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CRS Issue Statement on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations

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The closing, reduction in scope, or expansion of military installations on domestic soil and overseas, the privatization of government-built military housing, the provision of benefits and medical care to eligible veterans, and the redeployment of military units to the United States from overseas garrisons have drawn congressional attention in recent sessions. The funds to support all of these activities are provided by the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act debated annually in both chambers.

For the Second Session of the 111th Congress, issues directly related to military construction could include enhancement of infrastructure in communities absorbing an expanded military presence due to the 2005 round of base closures and realignments and a reassessment of the number and location of U.S. military installations overseas. While appropriations for compensation, pensions, and housing for veterans are statutorily mandated, there is considerable leeway for discretionary spending, and hence influence over policy, in areas such as medical treatment, construction of veterans' medical facilities, and veterans' burials. Other issues deliberated during past sessions have included the nature of the disparate medical care provided to ageing veterans of World War II and injured youthful veterans of current military operations, whether to delay or modify the execution of the current round of military base closures, and where and when to redeploy forces to new bases overseas or return them to installations on U.S. soil.

In deliberating the appropriation bill for FY2011, the 111th Congress will also likely face a wide array of concerns ranging from the transition of armed service personnel from military to veteran care, the cleanup of former military property, the lease of defense property for private development, and providing relief for military families forced to sell their homes in a depressed market, to providing incremental funding for major construction projects. Possible Obama Administration proposals for the expansion of veterans benefits, differences in the provision of medical care by the Departments of the Defense and Veterans Affairs, and the rapidly rising estimates of the cost to implement BRAC may prove particularly contentious. Also, during the 1st Session, the 111th Congress enacted advance appropriations for certain Department of Veterans Affairs medical care accounts: medical services, medical support and compliance, and medical facilities. As a result, the FY2010 bill appropriated funding for the previously mentioned accounts for FY2011 as well as for FY2010. During the 2nd Session, Congress may examine the adequacy of budget projections for FY2011 as well as for FY2012.

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